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War's End

A Play in One Act

By
HENRY A. COIT



CLYDE BROWNE COMPANY

HIGHLAND PARK :: LOS ANGELES

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1917

To the Soldiers

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no 1.

WAR'S END

CHARACTERS

Christian the First—King of Usurpia.
Mastercraft—the Mailed Chancellor.
Hulda—a peasant woman of dawning intellect.
Dr. Marx—physician to the King.
Otto—Secretary to the King.
Carl—an old soldier and husband to Hulda.

PLACE

The action takes place at the hunting lodge of King Christian in the heart of the Dark Forest—the far interior of Usurpia—a country at war with the world.

TIME

Any time in the dim future.

DESCRIPTIONS OF PERSONS OF PLAY

King Christian the First is a man between fifty and sixty years of age. He is tall and of military bearing. Black hair and moustache turning gray. He is dressed in "fatigue" uniform and riding boots. At times he speaks with firmness and decision—at others with a manner approaching diffidence—he is a man harrassed by uncertainty which shows in his actions and especially in his soliloquies. At times he is the man in doubt and fear and on occasion, although perhaps with an effort, the King.

Mastercraft is well along in years but carries his age well—is probably past sixty-five or even

seventy. He is tall and well proportioned—quick, muscular and active. He has iron gray hair in abundance and an iron gray mustache. He speaks in a tone of stern authority. Is dressed in conventional suit of traveling clothes.

Hulda is a woman who would be handsome were it not for the marks of suffering and privation. She is between thirty-five and forty years of age with brown hair turning gray. She is of large frame, but spare. Her clothing is old and worn, showing the signs of travel—it is of coarse homespun material. She speaks with indifference and in a rather dazed fashion when she first appears, but this attitude both of speech and action becomes warm and vehement as action proceeds. In the closing scene she lapses into the tone and attitude of the “mother,” apparently forgetful of all except the babe.

Carl is an old soldier. Grizzled in the service, being a campaigner. He is about fifty years of age with gray hair and wears an army uniform very badly worn and with several patches. He carries or wears a campaign hat. His height is not above five feet eight or nine inches and he inclines to be portly as is evidenced by his clothes alone, which hang loosely upon him, as he is now thin and emaciated from want approaching starvation. He still maintains, however, a military carriage. He wears an old army cloak over his shoulders which swings open in front revealing his tattered uniform. His left sleeve is empty.

Dr. Marx is the conventional type of professional man of fifty with black hair and beard square cut. He wears glasses and is dressed in dark clothes.

Otto is a slight, tall man of forty-five with dark hair, mustache and beard. He is alert, covertly jealous of the Chancellor though he treats him with deference. To the King he is profoundly respectful in an affectionate and solicitous manner.

SCENE I.

(The interior of the King's hunting lodge. A large room finished in the rough with logs but elaborately furnished and equipped with comforts and conveniences. The floor coverings are of the skins of wild animals while the walls are decorated with stuffed and mounted animal heads, such as the heads of deer, elk, bison, bear, boars, etc. A huge fireplace of stone is on left about the middle of room over which is a mantel with handsome chiming clock and ornaments in bronze representing scenes of the chase. Here and there, both hanging on the walls and in gun rack and standing in convenient corners are various guns, small arms, army swords, etc. A large couch, covered with a bear skin, is drawn up near the fire so that it faces front of stage. On the other side is a large oaken chair across which is thrown another wild animal skin. Between this chair and the front of stage is an oak writing table littered with papers, maps, books, writing material, pens, ink stand, etc. An art iron reading lamp of large proportions is standing on the table burning.

At back of stage are a pair of heavy curtains which screen double French windows presumably leading onto a porch. There are two doors at right and left forward respectively—one leading to another part of lodge and one a private entrance.

The room is further furnished with several oak chairs all of the massive type. A fire burns in the fireplace.

Discovered as curtain ascends the King seated

in large chair in front of fire gazing reflectively into it. It is night. The light from the fire and reading lamp illumine his face.'

KING. (*Soliloquizing*) The silence and uncertainty weigh heavily! (*sighs deeply and moves uneasily*) More terrible is uncertainty than war's alarm! (*shakes himself with impatient gesture*). No news—and it grows late. (*The clock on the mantel chimes the hour of eleven*) Since the hour of seven has the doctor been ministering to the Queen while I, a King, am apparently forgot—even Otto has not yet returned. (*pause*) Sometimes I fairly curse old Mastercraft—and yet I could not do without him. Otto was to meet him at the secret place and come at once to me. (*pause—irritated and impatiently*) This waiting, waiting, waiting, tormented by lack of news while life and death play hide and seek at my very elbow, drives me to distraction. (*Rises and paces up and down the length of the room, pausing in front of fire as sleigh bells are heard outside.*) At last! I feel his presence—and now that he has come I fear to meet him—such influence has he upon my person. (*pause as sleigh bells are again heard. The King draws himself up to his full height, assuming a military attitude*). Courage! Remember that you are a King! (*Grosses and exits door right.*)

(As soon as the door closes behind the KING, the curtains at windows rear are cautiously drawn aside and CARL steps stealthily from behind them and advances softly, listening, to the fire where he pauses, stretching his one hand out to its warmth.)

CARL. (*Soliloquizing*) How cold it is! (*looks at his hand*) When I look at this one member, now bound to do a double duty, I can but think of its lost mate left rotting on the field at Mar-blegate, and it aids to keep me firm in my set purpose. (*He looks toward door where KING retired.*) Little did you know as you stepped out, surrounded by Imperial gloom, how nearly you had shaken hands with Death. (*Draws from beneath his army cloak a polished bayonette to which he speaks.*) Ah, trusty friend! who served me well in puncturing the vitals of the so-called enemy—though God knows they were strangers and human just like me—you have been sharpened and polished for a worthy cause at last and you will not fail when driven at the guts of that cursed man who calls himself a King and close allied with God. Those sons of mine left buried in an unknown trench with quicklime for a funeral shroud, the wife who brought them forth and now is wandering God knows where, or dead—aye! and the sons, the ravished daughters and

the tortured mothers of those countless fools, blinded by this hollow dream of allegiance to Imperial cause regardless of humanity—who suffered and died in order that his race might be perpetuated and his power kept intact! You will be avenged since old Carl at last has wakened from his sleep. (*Stops abruptly to listen.*) I hear someone astir! (*Turns to curtains.*) The curtains will conceal me till the proper time, and be convenient. (*Withdraws hastily behind curtains rear.*)

(*The door right opens and the KING, followed by the CHANCELLOR and OTTO, enter. They all advance to the fire, the CHANCELLOR and OTTO removing heavy fur coats and gloves.*)

MASTERCRAFT. (*to KING*) What news, your Majesty! Have we an heir?

KING. No news as yet, though since seven o'clock the doctor has been engaged with the Queen. I pray to God that all is well. (*hesitates*) What if it should be brought forth dead?

MASTERCRAFT. No fear of that! The Queen, her Majesty, has been in excellent health in spite of all the cares of State, and though undoubtedly anxiety assailed her, there could be nothing else to disturb her here—no news to worry from the front—no roar of distant cannon. It is most conducive to a favorable accouchment.

OTTO. Poor lady!

KING. Go, Otto, enquire you of news of the Queen.

OTTO. I go, your Majesty! (*Bows and exits door left.*)

KING. And now, my Chancellor, what is the news you bring? Have we made gains—

MASTERCRAFT. (*Interrupting*) Not now, your Majesty, I beg of you! You seem unstrung—the news will keep.

KING. (*Impatiently*) Out with it man—I am consumed with impatience. The truth—and at once—I can stand this vague uncertainty no longer.

MASTERCRAFT. 'Tis well, your Majesty! To be sure we have not advanced as, perhaps, you might have wished,—in fact we have lost some ground, but wholly unimportant and thereby have strengthened our position strategically. The press, of course, under our wise censorship, continues favorable to our ends, while the people believe that each engagement is a victory.

KING. (*Sadly*) I wish this cursed war was done. The press—the people! What of their comment!—All coached and tutored—the horrid facts concealed—and you boast of this dissembling—this deceit—as a necessary and praiseworthy function of diplomacy! You drove me

on and on, further and further from my better instincts, and held me to the vision of a world Empire as the only fit inheritance for the sons of the King of Usurpia—and now those sons, in answer to the public clamor and your advice and urgency, lie cold and unavailing. Suppose now there should be no heir—not even a girl—what then?

MASTERCRAET. (*persuasively*) Your Majesty! Do not reproach me. All these matters have been gone fully into between us two and now it is too late to turn. All those niceties of State of which you would complain were necessary to the fulfillment of our enterprise. As to an heir—I fear not in that regard. It will be well. Permit me to remind your Majesty, that I, the mailed Chancellor, have never failed.

OTTO. (*Entering door left*) The doctor Marx waits upon you, sire! (*OTTO stands aside as the man of science enters.*)

DOCTOR. (*bowing*) Your Majesty! it is a son and he lives!

KING. (*fervently*) Thank God!

DOCTOR. This is a grave moment, your Majesty, and, (*bowing in direction of MASTERCRAFT*) with your permission, I will speak quite frankly.

KING. (*anxiously*) What now, man? Speak

out! You say he lives—what then?

DOCTOR. He lives—yes! but her Majesty, the Queen, may lose her life—and even though she recover she cannot nurse the babe and without its natural nourishment it cannot live.

KING. What then?

DOCTOR. A substitute must be found at once—an hour hence may be too late.

KING. (*Sinking into chair and dropping his head in his hands—in despair.*) For naught! Ah! cursed day when I this war declared which hath deprived my Kingdom of an heir!

MASTERCRAFT. (*Who has been listening intently, vehemently to OTTO*) Quickly, Otto, without an instant's delay—drive with all speed to the secret meeting place where my high powered car awaits. Here, (*writes hastily on card*) hand this to the man in waiting there; thence with all speed to the field hospital and give this second note to the surgeon in charge (*writes on another card*) who will attend to the rest. A peasant woman was taken with birth pains on the roadside as I passed there today; fetch her here—never mind her child if indeed it still lives. Do you understand?

OTTO. (*Taking up coat and hat in haste*) I obey! (*Exits door right.*)

DOCTOR. He should be back in time—it is the

best that can be done. (*to KING*) Your Majesty, all has been done within the bounds of human possibility—we can but wait—it depends upon the Chancellor's directions being carried out and,—the compliance of the woman. (*Observes the KING critically and speaks with affection.*) Come, your Majesty, you have not eaten in hours—this will not do—as your physician I demand that you partake of food. Come! (*Leads way to door.*)

MASTERCRAFT. With your permission, your Majesty, I too, will break fast and otherwise refresh myself—we may converse at leisure whilst we eat.

KING. By all means—I presume you have not tasted food for hours. I will join you at the board.

(*MASTERCRAFT follows the DOCTOR, both bowing, out door right.*)

KING. (*continuing*) Oh God, desert me not lest all this bloodshed shall have been in vain. (*He straightens up with an effort, as though pulling himself together.*) Remember that you are a King! (*Exits door right.*)

(*As soon as the door closes on the KING, CARL comes from between curtains rear and advances cautiously to the fire. He pauses and then kicks at the logs in the fire viciously.*)

CARL. (*soliloquizing*) How different he seems when quite alone—one would not know he was a king. And then he does not seem so set—more like one driven by stern necessity, or against his will. (*pauses reflectively.*) So, his sons, too, are lost to him, and in this same accursed cause as lost me mine. (*Pauses and again kicks logs.*) The Chancellor! I do believe he is the man—and yet all we hear upon the field is “The King.” How well I remember at the beginning of the war when we passed in review. He was there, mounted on a coal black stallion. The Chancellor was by his side—silent and austere. The King dressed in full regalia with medals on his breast until he glistened in the sun like a thousand diamonds—one could scarce look upon him without being blinded. (*Sits down in arm chair.*) I may as well take it easy and get warmed whilst I wait—I am nigh chilled through. (*Sighs rather contentedly as the warmth of fire reaches him.*) Here am I, old Carl, battle scarred and aged, and shabby, sitting at the King’s fire—though uninvited, God knows. (*Pauses reflectively.*) Well, well! it is a sorry mess—thousands just like me, why, I don’t even know where my wife Hulda is. Our little cottage which I left all shining in the sun; the well kept gardens; the neatly painted fence, the stone edged path leading to the vine clad

porch—all ashes, ruins—blown to the four winds. The enemy we set out to crush so bravely within thirty days proved foemen more than worthy of our steel and turned the tables on us—they have driven us back trench by trench, burning and sacking as did we upon our mad advance—paid us off in our own coin. (*A noise is heard beyond door right and CARL rises hastily.*) Someone comes! (*Again draws out his bayonette and looks at it as if it were a living thing.*) No, not yet. We will wait and see—maybe it will be the Chancellor. (*Retires behind curtains just in time to escape detection by KING and DOCTOR who enter from door right together.*)

KING. No, no! good Doctor! It is no use—I cannot eat; no morsel tempts me and what little I do force myself to taste turns gall. We will wait here for Mastercraft. Mastercraft! I would I had his appetite. Nothing seems to upset his mode of life. He will eat his fill, I venture, with as much relish as he used to dine when all was peace and we did but plot.

DOCTOR. I trust you will permit, your Majesty, that I now attend the Queen. Mastercraft will join you shortly and your good Otto will return ere long—he had not very far to go. It is most fortunate we are so near a hospital; there is not another within miles of that retreat. The peas-

ant woman's loss may prove to be our gain.

KING. Go, good Doctor! Mastercraft has thought of everything.

DOCTOR. Your Majesty! (*Bows and exits.*)

KING. (*Paces up and down the length of room, pausing now and then as he soliloquizes.*) I know why old Mastercraft insisted that I seek seclusion in this far retreat—he feared I would relent. After all, who is it that is King? He seems to dominate me even in my private life. I think he laid a special stress tonight upon the efficiency of those factories which build our engines of destruction, and in the same breath he asked, nay, demanded,—further appropriations from our depleted purse for their maintenance.—Otto told me years ago that he, the cunning diplomat, had invested in those same factories from his private funds and now I undertsand he owns them all, while we support them. (*pause*) And yet I love the man, even while fearing and distrusting him. (*There is a flutter and slight noise behind the curtains. The KING turns quickly toward them*) Is someone there!—No! it is but my imagination—excited from my high wrought nerves. Even here, my whereabouts kept a secret, I fear and live in dread, my nerves on edge until each noise and breath of air are multiplied and seem to bode for ill.

(*MASTERCRAFT enters door right smoking large black cigar.*)

MASTERCRAFT. (*to King*) I dined quite heartily and now am fit for further efforts.

KING. (*taking seat before fire*) I cannot understand, my Chancellor, how through all these long and weary months—since we began to fail—you have maintained your even poise. I admit to you, my friend, that I am all unstrung.

MASTERCRAFT. (*who stands before fire*) Pardon, your Majesty! We do not fail—and cannot. You may rest in prime security while I am spokesman and it need not be ever known that there ever seemed a doubt.

KING. But, I fear you do not tell me all—I do not know the worst.

MASTERCRAFT. The worst, your Majesty, is that your Highness fears! We have, as might well be expected, met with some reverses, but they are not really serious, and while the enemy appear to gain, they do in fact but draw nearer to our trap. All goes well! The munition plants are running night and day, full handed—and the men on but half pay;—our hospital service is the best it ever has been; the food supply, while scant, is not exhausted and we have some plans that soon, we hope, will fill our granaries; the people, a little restive, perhaps, realize the necessities of war and

have become enured to what at first seemed hardship. Next month we make our master stroke and then our enemies will gladly sue for peace upon our terms—insuring the fulfillment and success of all our dreams and planning.

KING. But in the meantime thousands starve—the women and the little ones, while I—

MASTERCRAFT. Pardon, your Majesty! but as you yourself have just now said, you are unstrung. Now we may not turn to blame ourselves where no blame is due—this war was thrust upon us, that is, it was necessary for the future of our State and is no more than that for which we planned. Wars bring death and suffering—it always has been so and our purpose warrants all its costs. And now it will soon end, and in our favor.

KING. But thousands more will starve and die on battlefields meanwhile—it has cost too much already.

MASTERCRAFT. It is for the Empire and—the King.

KING. Aye! the king without a throne—in hiding for fear of what? my friend! Wouldst guard me against the dangers of the front, or from the news, or from my people—those for whom I dreamed—or from myself lest, knowing all, I weaken and thus fail you?

MASTERCRAFT. Your Majesty mistakes—it is

none of those dangers which you but surmise, but lest—

KING. (*rises with a hasty and impatient gesture; draws himself to his full height and speaks with hauteur*) No more of this quibbling! I will talk no more on this unpleasant subject—remember, I am King.

(*The door right opens and OTTO enters.*)

OTTO. (*bowing*) Your Majesty, the woman waits, though she seemed so loath to come I was obliged to go further than mere urging. Shall I lead her to your presence?

KING. Go bring the doctor to us, if he can be spared.

OTTO. Your Majesty! (*exits, bowing.*)

MASTERCRAFT. It will be well, your Majesty!

KING. (*to MASTERCRAFT*) Do you remain, together with the doctor, when she comes. The doctor will tell her of her duties—I of their importance.

(*The door opens and OTTO ushers in the DOCTOR and stands waiting at attention by the door.*)

OTTO. Your Majesty! the doctor Marx!

MARX. I understand the woman has been fetched, your Majesty! 'Tis none too soon, if soon enough.

OTTO. She is without, Dr. Marx, will you see her here?

KING. Bring her at once.

(OTTO bows and withdraws while all stand in silence with their faces turned expectantly toward the door. OTTO returns in a moment and stands aside as HULDA enters and takes her stand just within the threshold, surveying the group at the fire.)

MASTERCRAFT. Just step this way, woman!

DOCTOR. (moving a chair near the fire and addressing the KING—HULDA ignoring MASTERCRAFT) She had best be seated to conserve her strength.

KING. (kindly, to HULDA) Sit here, good woman, by the fire. Dr. Marx has something to say to you—please give strict heed.

HULDA. (She speaks with no show of fear, disrespect or embarrassment—merely indifferently and as though somewhat dazed. When she enters, the curtains in rear move violently and Carl steps out, but as all backs are at the moment turned in his direction, he is unobserved. He catches himself, smothers an exclamation and hastily retires again behind curtains.) I will stand, if you please!

KING. As you like!

DOCTOR. (to HULDA) Of necessity I must

be brief, so please pay strict attention to what I have to say. Your countenance betrays that you are already aware that you stand in the presence of the King and Mastercraft, his Chancellor. I am the physician to the King. (*pause*) We sent for you to nurse a new born babe—that it should be so is of utmost importance to the crown. Every comfort will be provided you. I understand a babe was born to you but a few hours since—are you prepared to undertake this task?

HULDA. My babe!—yes, I had a babe—a man-child—a blossom for your cannon, but I had it not for long. It died from exposure where we lay upon the roadside in the snow.

DOCTOR. Alas! my good woman, such has been the fate of many—but sacrificed to our common country's necessities. This babe will bring you comfort.

HULDA. Whose is the babe?

MASTERCRAFT. (*who has been listening intently*) What matters that? It interests the State and—it is your King's command.

HULDA. I know no more commands but those of this poor heart. Whose is the child, if you would have my answer?

KING. We have not time to waste in argument! (*to HULDA*) Do you mean, good mother, you would not obey your King if it were

his command you nurse this babe unless we give you knowledge of its birth?

HULDA. Just so—even though it were the King's command.

KING. Know it at once then. It is the heir to the throne of Usurpia whom you shall suckle at those peasant breasts.

HULDA. Can it be true—before God I ask you?

KING. Do you question your King? Time passes—I speak the truth,—before God!

HULDA. Then, thou King of Usurpia, answer me, a peasant by the grace of God and King—where are my two sons, my babe, my husband?

MASTERCRAFT. (*sternly*) Woman, knowest thou that men have been condemned to death for less impertinence than thou hast shown your King? Be quick! (*to DOCTOR*) Give her your instructions and lead her to the task at once.

DOCTOR. Not so fast—this, by its nature, must be a voluntary undertaking. (*to HULDA*) Come, good woman—don't talk nonsense. It is a great honor that has been thrust upon you.

HULDA. (*to DOCTOR*) Is it a fact that this babe's life depends upon my nursing it, as the man who brought me here against my will pretends, and no other wet nurse nigh?

DOCTOR. It is a solemn fact.

HULDA. Then doubly I say no! Even though

I knew 'twere certain death to it within the hour! My babe perished for want of common covering though these full breasts were wont to burst, and this poor, aching heart as well from the desire to feed my little one.

KING. (*to HULDA—vehemently*) You cannot know what you say! (*to DOCTOR*) Is she in delerium?

DOCTOR. No signs of that, your Majesty. You must reason with her.

KING. (*to HULDA*) Then listen! You complain of what this war has cost you in common with the thousands of other sufferers. Think you that your King has quite escaped? I have lost my sons as well as you—our Empire lacks an heir should this babe die, and then would the Usurpian dream fall like powdered snow upon the waste—scattered to the winds. We fight but for a principle, and each in one grand common cause has strived to bear his burden; my family, my home, no less than all the rest. A babe is born—a son—to glorify the name and extend the Empire for the use and benefit of thousands yet unborn and you have been ordained of God to nurture it and continue through your humble person that to which the King gave life. It is enough!

MASTERCRAFT. (*to HULDA*) Besides, the

reward will be rich—commensurate with the importance of the task.

HULDA. Where is my own babe? Can you return it to me? My sons! My husband! where are they? I gave them all to this cruel war, the purposes of which I do not even know, nor do I care, but if that babe of yours should through me grow up to be a man and foster this same scheme of things, I would be cursed and not ordained of God.

KING. (*sternly*) Remember! I am your King and I command!

DOCTOR. Time presses.

HULDA. I will none of you! Do with me what e'er you like, but for aught of me your babe may go to join my own.

MASTERCRAFT. Would you have your sorrows and our losses made in vain? Can you not understand that it is Usurpia—your Country—that commands of you this service? Are you in your senses and awake?

HULDA. Awake indeed! Though for years I did but dream. I moved with restlessness in that dream when my two sons, my first born, were torn from my side; when my good man, their father and the father of my babe, had been lost to me I raised my head and opened wide my eyes, and when my babe, the last of all my earthly

ties folded his little arms in death as he lay quiet on this breast, I fully woke—and now I see the horror of it all, the uselessness, the cruelty, the hell-hole you have made of this fair land—and now of me, awake and staring horror-stricken, you would ask I lend of my own substance to enable you to perpetuate the crime. No! a thousand times—not though all Usurpia should perish—it were better so, and quickly, than this outrageous war continue to satisfy your own ambition. Let me go, or cast me out, but don't profane my motherhood!

KING. (*to DOCTOR*) Can nothing be done—she seems beside herself?

OTTO. (*entering uncerimoniously*) Oh, Doctor Marx, hasten—the nurse is urgent.

DOCTOR. (*to KING*) Your Majesty must persuade her — it is the only course. (*Follows OTTO out door right hastily.*)

MASTERCRAFT. (*to HULDA*) Think, woman, of the alternative!

HULDA. What do you mean by that—but I care not.

MASTERCRAFT. The King will answer.

KING. (*to MASTERCRAFT*) This is indeed the battlefield—Ah! God, that I should have been spared to suffer such unutterable anguish! (*to HULDA*) Think again, woman! The

Queen is a woman, too, with all the mother instinct like yourself—her sons, like yours, were sacrificed to Usurpia. Will you do less than will your Queen? Have you no pity on her mother-heart?

HULDA. A woman! She! and mother! Ugh! used for breeding purposes to supply God's land with slave-drivers!

MASTERCRAFT. (*in great anger*) Hold woman! Would you insult the King? I will—

KING. (*to MASTERCRAFT*) Not so fast—I still am King, and this is my affair—no threats avail, nor blustering methods. (*to HULDA*) Come, I do not doubt you suffer much—and so do we all, all suffer that this righteous war may end in glory to our arms and Empire!

HULDA. What matter whose the glory—so it end? (*pauses—thinking*) So that it end,—but when—that is the question? Maybe the King can answer that?

KING. God knows! God knows!

HULDA. And could you, the King, end the war by word or written sign?

KING. Aye! but at the loss of all we have these long years striven for.

HULDA. (*seriously and persistently*) But could you bring it to an end if you so willed—at once?

KING. What are you seeking, woman, answer? You put a question that I have heard asked by my inmost soul—and it has tortured me, yet I have answered it not.

MASTERCRAFT. (*to KING*) I plainly see, your Majesty, that you would temporize with this low woman. At all events, God's will be done—a death's a death, and it is the glory of our arms and the advancement of all our arts and sciences to all the world for which we fight as well as for a crown.

HULDA. (*ignoring MASTERCRAFT*) And is this power with you alone?

KING. My word is law.

HULDA. (*advancing and speaking with great force and conviction*) Then may your babe be saved!

KING. (*anxiously*) Do you relent?

MASTERCRAFT. (*frowning*) How so?

HULDA. The peasant woman will make terms—aye, even with a King. (*to KING*) Send forth your messengers with word to stop this bloody war—recall your arms—at once, even though it may be the ruin of your cause, and no babe ever born of woman will be nurtured with more care.

CARL steps boldly out from behind curtains and advances to group. When he is within a few paces of them he is noticed.)

KING. What means this intrusion. Sirrah!

HULDA. (*staring as if she cannot believe her eyes*) My Carl! Thank God, it is my Carl—and still alive! (*she advances to Carl and throws her arms around him; they embrace*) Thank God!

MASTERCRAFT. (*in rage*) Indeed, what means this? Who are you that thus intrude upon our privacy?

KING. He must have come in at yonder window—I thought I heard some movement there earlier this evening.

CARL. (*to HULDA*) Yes, safe and just in time! (*to KING and MASTERCRAFT after disengaging himself from Hulda's embrace*) Aye! I have been here long enough to know which way the wind blows. An old soldier, I—that is, what's left of me—and I came unbidden.

KING. Scoundrel! Have we traitors here? Who gave you admittance—speak or 'twill be the worse for you.

CARL. I will speak that you may know had it not been for Hulda, there, of whom you have sore need, little cause would you have had to worry about an heir. That is plain enough. Hidden though you be, I found you out. As to the rest, what does it matter? I am here and know the business you are at and maybe I can take your

message to the Minister of War—old Carl knows the way fast enough.

MASTERCRAFT. What do you know—speak! Whence did you come and why? The King commands you.

CARL. It is too late to prate of King's commands—I think the King just now is needy sore of aid, as is your sorry army, already mutinous though held in check through fear and superstition. Not so, old Carl, who fears not God nor man, nor King—(*looking directly and defiantly at MASTERCRAFT*) Aye! nor Chancellor.

KING. We have no time for parley—since he is here and in the secret let him stay and, as he says, maybe he can serve. God knows we need service now since you, (*sternly to MASTERCRAFT*) sir, have deprived me of my customary guards through fear my hiding place should become known—I believe that was your excuse.

HULDA. (*to CARL*) Did you hear, my Carl, the matter we discussed and my proposal?

CARL. I did, and right heartily I approve.

KING. (*to HULDA*) Are those your only terms, my woman—quickly?

DOCTOR. (*entering door right*) There is no time to lose, your Majesty. I hope you have bent this woman to your will—the future of the Empire now depends upon it.

MASTERCRAFT. Not so, Doctor Marx. The future of the Empire, heir or no heir, will be safe and we will have no compromise.

DOCTOR. It is life and death which we consider now. Your decision, woman, must be prompt or it will matter not at all.

HULDA. I named my terms—the Chancellor objects. I am ready only on those terms.

KING. I am sick, and now that an opportunity is offered—with the matter brought home—I am not unfriendly to a proposal this good woman makes. Woman, I accept your terms—the life of my son and heir fostered through you, for withdrawal of the troops and this war's end.

MASTERCRAFT. (*raging*) I will not have it so. Remember, please, your Majesty, who is together with yourself responsible. Would you go forth into the world again beaten, whipped, despised,—all your vaunted boasting shown but a bubble to be burst at the first squalling of an infant! Are you the man who calls himself a King and thus lay down your arms to a lowly, vagrant peasant woman who—

KING. (*angrily*) Enough! You are responsible—you misled me from the very start,—I now believe to gain your selfish ends—out of my sight! After all, I still am King. (*Points the way to the door.*)

MASTERCRAFT. (*turning to door*) Half-wit, weakling—you do not think I will permit such sickly surrender! I will put a stop to any such childish scheme long before you can make up your mind—I—(*moving to the door.*)

CARL. (*drawing bayonette steps quickly between MASTERCRAFT and door*) Not so fast, my Chancellor! The game is not played out until the last card is thrown on the table—you have old Carl to reckon with. I think I will request you to remain right here until the orders are safe delivered to the Minister of War.

(*MASTERCRAFT hesitates, takes step toward door as though to pass CARL but CARL'S determination is evident and MASTERCRAFT stops.*)

MASTERCRAFT. Has the Empire gone crazy? (*sneering*) We will see who has the last card. (*Takes seat nonchalantly by fire. Takes out large black cigar which he lights from a jeweled match-box.*)

DOCTOR. Pardon me, your Majesty, but my interests revolve around Life and Death. You must hasten. While you argue, the Heir—your son—totters on the brink.

(*The KING, with the bearing of a man who has firmly made up his mind, steps quickly to the door where he pulls an old-fashioned bell pull,*

then takes seat at table and providing himself with paper he takes up pen and writes hurriedly. As the KING finishes writing OTTO enters door right and stands at attention.)

KING. (*rising—to OTTO*) Take this note at once—all possible haste—and deliver it in person to the Minister of War!

OTTO. I understand, your Majesty!

MASTERCRAFT. (*rising—to OTTO*) I would have a word with you before (*takes a step toward door, but CARL with the drawn bayonette still in his hand steps in front of him*)—

KING. (*interrupting—to OTTO*) I forbid you converse with the Chancellor, or anyone until my command has been fulfilled.

OTTO. I understand, your Majesty! (*takes paper handed him by KING and places it securely within his inmost pocket and turns to door*).

CARL. Hold! not so fast—let's see there is no trick—no—

KING. (*drawing himself up haughtily*) You have my word—the promise of a King.

CARL. (*looking steadfastly at KING*) It is enough, your Majesty! (*bows profoundly*).

KING. (*to OTTO*) Begone!—all possible haste.

OTTO. I obey, your Majesty! (*exits door right followed by DOCTOR*).

KING. (*to HULDA*) The mother is victorious.
MASTERCRAFT. Fools!

(*The DOCTOR enters door right holding an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes in his arms. He advances to HULDA and places it gently on her breast—she snuggles it to her.*)

DOCTOR. (*to HULDA*) The future of the Empire rests with you!

HULDA. (*Ignoring everybody and holding the infant closely*) The darling! (*She begins crooning to it.*)

KING. (*Advancing to HULDA'S side gazes intently down at the infant, then with his hands clasped across his breast he turns his eyes heavenward*) At last, Oh God, have I made with Thee a true alliance.

MASTERCRAFT. (*from chair where he sits sneering and glowering while CARL stands guard beside him*) Fools!

(*HULDA begins undoing front of dress preparatory to nursing the infant. She takes the chair before the fire just vacated by the KING. The DOCTOR stands aside watching HULDA and the babe with a professional eye.*)

CARL. (*looks happily down at HULDA as she draws the babe still closer to her breast—to HULDA*) You sit now in a King's place.

(CURTAIN)

